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ABSTRACT

The parents of students in the second year of a kindergarten French immersion program were surveyed to determine their experiences in the program, and a sample of the children who had spent one or two years in immersion was interviewed by a procedure developed for assessing the French language skills. The interview procedure was planned to assess listening comprehension and communication skills varying from single words to groups of words or sentences, with consideration for brief attention spans and individual rates of progress. The subjects were 31 students who had attended four-year-old and five-year-old immersion kindergarten and a matched group of children who had only attended the five-year-old kindergarten. It was found that the children understood most of what was said to them during the interview, and that about three-fourths of each group responded entirely in French, and those with two years' immersion responded with a noun or pronoun and a verb much more often and used more words than the less experienced group. Many from both groups spoke clearly with natural intonation, pace, and volume and appeared interested and confident. Teachers' comments during the interviewers' school visits were also noted. Parents' responses indicated general satisfaction with the program's success in teaching French, with a desire for smaller classes and more French cultural education. (MSE)

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SPEAKING FRENCH IN FIVE-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1983 a new four-year-old French immersion kindergarten was approaching the end of its first year; it had been established at parental request in a school which had only immersion classes. One other such class in the Ottawa Board of Education system had been established for 20 years in a school which also had French immersion classes up to the end of grade 6. In 1984, as these children approached the end of five-year-old kindergarten, the Research Centre staff was asked to evaluate this programme and carried out both questionnaire surveys and some individual interview-type testing.

In an effort to determine parents' impressions and students' backgrounds in the second language, as well as their experiences in the immersion programme, the questionnaire which had been originally designed and sent to parents of students at both schools in 1983, was modified and sent to parents of the same students who were now in their second year of French immersion. The questionnaire was also sent to parents of students who had entered five-year-old French immersion kindergarten for their first year at school.

In addition, an interview procedure was developed in an attempt to assess the French language skills of kindergarten children who had spent one or two years in French immersion. This report will describe the interview, the sample, and the student's responses, and will also provide information based on the parents' responses to the questionnaires.

THE INTERVIEW

The overviews of the Ottawa Board of Education programme for five-year-olds in both French immersion and English kindergarten contain similar objectives to provide for a wide range of individual differences within a well-balanced programme. Objectives specific to French immersion classes include the provision of an opportunity to learn the second language, the objective being for the students to be able to use a few descriptive words or sentences and to be able to say a few things in a well formed sentence.

In recognition of the fact that children must hear and understand the language before being able to speak it, a note is included in the outline regarding expectations: "It is normal at the beginning that a child speak in his/her mother tongue. When enough vocabulary and structure of language is known to meet his/her needs, the child will then use them in conversations".

The interview was planned to assess both comprehension of the spoken word and communication skills varying from single words to groups of words or sentences. Discussions with staff members, observations in each classroom and copies of course outlines were used in planning the different sections of the interview, and an attempt was made to include an adequate range of difficulty.

The interviewers spent a half day in each of the five classes. It was hoped that being introduced to the students and spending some time with them would help the children to feel more comfortable when their turn came to leave the classroom for the interview. The children were also told that the interviewers would be back with something interesting for them to do. The observations helped the researchers

to identify the vocabulary and materials used by the teachers and to prepare vocabulary lists as one source to use in planning the interview. Materials provided by the consultants and the teachers indicated topics common to all of the classes, and observations helped to identify the levels the students appeared to have reached in their ability to understand and communicate.

The interview was intended to assess the students' language use informally and in a manner as similar as possible to the kindergarten situation. Consideration was given to the attention span and different rates of progress of five-year-old children, as well as to their sensitivity in new situations and response to something new and interesting. The procedures were made as simple as possible to provide for consistency in administration of the various sub-tests. There were six sections requiring from about 90 seconds to 4 minutes each, and the entire interview usually required less than 20 minutes in all.

In each school the interview setting was a separate room some distance from the kindergarten classroom. The interviewer sat on a small kindergarten chair at a low table with the test materials out of sight on the floor beside her. The child was escorted from the classroom and back by a second staff member from the Research Centre who sat to one side and recorded the responses during the interview. Most of the children were happy to come with the visitor and readily chatted as they walked through the halls and then sat down at the table with some anticipation. The interviewer spoke to the child in French throughout the interview.

THE STUDENTS

A sample of 31 students who had attended four year old immersion kindergarten and a matched group who had not attended kindergarten the previous year were selected from a total of 95 children in four senior kindergarten classes in two schools. A fifth class of five-year-old immersion students included no students from either group. These students and their teacher kindly consented to participate in classroom observations and tryouts of the interview items.

Students with two years of French immersion were matched with students with one year on the basis of sex and age. To add to the size of the groups three girls with two years' experience in French at one school were matched with three girls with one year's experience at the other school; in all other cases the matched pairs were taught by the same teacher. A few students were excluded because their backgrounds in French at home could not be matched. The final experimental group consisted of 13 boys and 18 girls with a mean age of 5.9, while the control group contained the same number of boys and girls, with the same mean age. Of the 45 students enrolled in the four-year-old immersion program in the two schools, five moved out of the Ottawa Board school system and one transferred to the English program at his school.

It might be of interest to note that, at the beginning of the grade-one year, 57 students remained in the French Immersion Programme of the 62 students who participated in the interviews.

THE TESTS AND RESULTS

In this section a brief description will be given of each of the tests used followed by a presentation of the results of that test, in the order in which the tests were presented to the children. At the end of the section a summary table will show all of the results, first for receptive skills (listening comprehension) and then for expreusive skills (speaking).

Le lapin dans le panier.

This measure of expressive vocabulary was selected to be the first section of the interview, as it had been noted during observations in the classroom that the students always responded with warmth to toy rabbits which were used often for language practice in all the classrooms. In the test situation, the rabbit provided an immediate focus, directing attention away from less familiar surroundings and not-so-well-known adults. Because it was recognized that some of the students might not have reached the level yet where oral responses in French would come easily, vocabulary was included for this section which appeared to have been repeated often in the classroom. In addition, questions requiring only one or two words in response, were asked and all responses given by the child were readily accepted in an effort to begin the interview with a pleasant and successful experience.

The white rabbit, a hand puppet, was the subject of brief comments and questions about colours, parts of the body and locations in and around the basket. When this section was completed, after about two minutes, the rabbit waved and said 'au revoir'. In scoring, one point was given for each acceptable response to a question regardless of gender or number.

It will be observed in Table 1 that many items in this test were answered correctly by over 80 per cent of the children tested and that there was relatively little difference in the performance of the two groups. Most of the items involved a brief response to a direct question, usually "Qu'est-ce que c'est?".

TABLE 1

LE LAPIN DANS LE PANIER: A GROUP COMPARISON OF EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY

	Item	Group A*		Group B*	
		Number correct	per cent correct	Number correct	Per cent correct
1	blanc	30	97	30	97
2	les yeux	29	94	24	77
3	le nez	28	90	30	97
4	la bouche	29	94	27	87
5	rose	26	84	24	77
6	l'oreille	29	94	25	81
7	la patte/main/bras	29	94	24	77
8	la queue	27	87	23	74
9	vide	0	0	4	13
10	dans	31	100	27	87
11	sur/en haut/any form of dessus/dessous	18	58	20	64
12	à côté	21	68	16	52
13	sous/en bas/any form of dessus or dessous	19	61	21	68
	Mean score		10.4		9.9
	Standard deviation		2.0		2.6
	Number of classes		31		31

* Group A: 5-year-old kindergarten students in second year of FI
Group B: 5-year-old kindergarten students in first year of FI

Item nine caused difficulty for both groups, perhaps partly because an incomplete sentence was used instead of a direct question. The examiner, while circling her hand within the now-empty basket, said "Il n'y a rien dans le panier. Il est ____." Another item using the same format had been tried out earlier and was withdrawn because it was even more difficult.

Picture recognition

In this section of the interview, 28 cards, each with four pictures, were shown in succession. When a single word or a short phrase was pronounced, the child responded by pointing to the one of the four which had been verbally indicated. The pictures were clear, line drawings of things that the child could have learned in French either directly in conversation with the teacher, or through units of study during kindergarten class-time. This section was placed second in the schedule as the student only was required to hear one or a few words spoken at a time and was not required to respond verbally. In addition, because it was expected that the children would do well, it was thought that this section would be a confidence builder.

Table 2 shows that all of the children in Group A answered the first ten of the 28 questions correctly and that Group B did almost as well. The four items which were the most difficult for both groups required knowledge of 'l'évier' or 'le lavabo', 'l'échelle', 'l'enfant qui s'étire' and 'le professeur'. When the seven responses involving verbs are examined separately, it will be seen that both groups tended to find the same verbs either difficult or easy. Because so many items tended to be easy, the standard deviation of the scores in both groups was rather low, but the mean for the children who had spent two years in immersion (Group A) was significantly higher than that for Group B ($p < 0.01$).

TABLE 2

PICTURE RECOGNITION: A GROUP COMPARISON OF AUDITORY VOCABULARY

	Item	Group A		Group B	
		Number correct	Per cent correct	Number correct	Per cent correct
1	l'automobile	31	100	31	100
2	la vache	31	100	28	90
3	le bébé	31	100	31	100
4	la fille	31	100	29	94
5	la balle	31	100	30	97
6	la main	31	100	30	97
7	le bateau	31	100	31	100
8	les enfants	31	100	30	97
9	le parapluie	31	100	31	100
10	la poule	31	100	31	100
11	l'enfant qui se lave	27	87	16	52
12	l'évier (le lavabo)	02	06	04	13
13	l'enfant qui est assis	30	97	29	94
14	la mitaine	31	100	31	100
15	l'enfant qui court	31	100	30	97
16	le tambour	31	100	30	97
17	la feuille	30	97	31	100
18	l'enfant qui saute	29	94	27	87
19	le cadeau	31	100	30	97
20	l'échelle	13	42	09	29
21	le serpent	27	87	27	87
22	les carottes	30	97	31	100
23	l'enfant qui s'étire	14	45	10	32
24	l'enfant qui mange	31	100	30	97
25	l'orange	31	100	31	100
26	le professeur	14	45	11	35
27	l'enfant qui se cache	31	100	27	87
28	la plume	28	90	24	77
	Mean score		24.8*		23.6
	Standard deviation		1.5		2.0
	Number of Cases		31		31

* The mean Group A is significantly greater than that for Group B ($p < 0.01$).

Le casse-tête (coccinelles).

The material used in this section was a wooden rectangular puzzle in which five identical red and black ladybugs, differing in size, are each fitted into their own shaped space. Each piece is also fitted with a handle for ease of manipulation. The puzzle was placed in front of the child, who was then asked to move the pieces according to the interviewer's directions. The child was also asked if the ladybugs were happy or sad and to count how many there were. Although these verbal responses were scored, most of the scoring is of the actions of the student resulting from his/her comprehension of the verbal instructions. The approximate time taken for this section, with 13 possible responses, was one and one half minutes.

Table 3 indicates that the items in this test also tended to be answered correctly by a high proportion of the children in each group. Although Group A had a slightly higher mean score than Group B, the difference was not statistically significant, there was a significant difference in the variance of the two groups ($p < 0.01$). The four words which gave the most difficulty were adjectives having to do with position, two of which were better known by the group with two years of immersion. Item 10, which asked the child to take a piece from the left and then from the right side of the puzzle, was scored as correct if the child indicated opposite positions on the puzzle, whether or not they were actually the left and right sides. In this case, the children who had spent only one year in immersion had a significantly higher proportion correct ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 3

LE CASSE-TETE REPRESENTANT LES COCCINELLES: A GROUP COMPARISON OF LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

	Item	Group A		Group B	
		Number correct	Per Cent correct	Number correct	Per Cent correct
1	Prends la plus grosse	31	100	31	100
2	Mets-la dans ta main	29	94	26	84
3	Est-elle triste?	29	94	29	94
4	Elle est ___.(contente)	26	84	26	84
5	Remets la coccinelle...	29	94	31	100
6	...Compter, combien...	27	87	26	94
7	(Compte correctement)	29	94	31	100
8	Premier	24	77	19	61
9	Au milieu	29	94	22	71
10	Gauche/droite	17	55	25	81
11	La plus petite	31	100	29	94
12	Mets-la sur la table	29	94	29	94
13	Donne-la moi	30	97	28	90
	Mean score		11.6		11.3
	Standard deviation		1.1		1.9
	Number of students		31		31

Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans la boîte?

A small blue box with a cover was placed on the table in front of the child for this part of the interview. The child was told that there was something inside and to open the box to see what it was. The box contained five items: a pencil, a sock, a button, an Easter egg and three coins enclosed in a plastic package. The student removed items one by one in whatever order he/she chose and was asked to name each one and to tell how it was used. For each object a score of two was possible, one for an acceptable name for the object and one for an acceptable verb describing what could be done with it. Gender or number of nouns and tense of verbs were not considered in the scoring. The time needed for this section ranged from one to three minutes.

As shown on Table 4 the students in Group A, as a group, were able to respond appropriately more often than those in Group B ($p < 0.05$). However, similarities in the response patterns occur in that for two of the five pairs of items, sock (3 and 4) and egg (7 and 8), both groups gave an associated verb more frequently than they gave a noun for the item. For the other three items, the reverse occurred. The groups also tended to find the same items difficult, but Group A responded twice as often with the verbs to describe wearing a sock and fastening a button. It is possible that these two verbs have been used in the classroom in other contexts. Perhaps some Group A students, having heard them used more often, were able to apply them in the different context.

TABLE 4

QU'EST-CE QU'IL Y A DANS LA BOITE? A GROUP COMPARISON OF EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

		Group A		Group B	
		Number correct	Per Cent correct	Number correct	Per Cent correct
1	crayon	23	74	22	71
2	écrire	18	58	13	62
3	chaussette/bas	17	55	08	26
4	porter/mettre	22	71	11	35
5	bouton	23	74	22	71
6	attacher	12	39	06	19
7	oeuf (de Pâques)/chocolat	26	84	20	65
8	manger/cacher	29	94	24	77
9	des pieces de monnaie/ de la monnaie	27	87	20	65
10	acheter	12	39	10	32
	Mean score		6.7*		5.0
	Standard deviation		2.5		3.1
	Number of cases		31		31

* The mean for Group A is significantly greater than that for Group B ($p < 0.05$).

Les cartes.

Eighteen flash cards were prepared for this section of the interview. Eleven of the pictures depicted children and/or adults performing some type of action. For these eleven pictures, the children were asked to tell about the picture. For another five cards, a specific question was asked, regarding the season, the weather, etc. One of the two remaining cards showed three shapes, and on the other there were five numerals. For the eleven action cards, one point was given for a verb and/or a noun as long as they were relevant. For the other cards, a specific response was required for either all or part of the score. In each case, pictures were chosen for which the response could be either a single word, a group of words or a sentence, to increase the likelihood that the child could give some response. The time required for this section was three to four minutes.

As shown in Table 5, the overall score for Group A is somewhat higher than for Group B, although the difference is not statistically significant. Students from both groups found responses for the cards depicting winter and Christmas most difficult to produce. As the seasons and special holidays are features of the kindergarten programme, it was felt that these topics probably were presented at that time. Many students obviously remembered that they had known these words and those who were able to recall them after up to five months were very pleased with themselves. To those who could not recall the vocabulary the interviewer said, "Il y a longtemps que tu as appris ce mot et c'est difficile de s'en rappeler, n'est-ce pas?"

Most students appeared to understand and to agree with her and demonstrated again that most were quite secure in accepting the fact that there was some vocabulary that they had not learned yet or had forgotten. Both groups found identifying numbers and shapes and describing the picture of children running to be the easiest responses to make.

TABLE 5

LES CARTES: A GROUP COMPARISON OF EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

		Maximum score	Mean	
			Group A	Group B
1	Les enfants courent	2	1.6	1.4
2	Les enfants marchent	2	1.4	1.3
3	Le garçon se brosse les dents	2	1.5	1.2
4	La fille boit	2	1.2	0.8
5	L'homme court. C'est le printemps	3	2.0	1.4
6	C'est l'hiver	1	0.3	0.3
7	Il fait soleil	1	0.9	0.9
8	Les enfants font de la bicyclette/ Les enfants vont à bicyclette	3	1.6	1.4
9	C'est Noël	1	0.2	0.3
10	Une personne colle	2	0.8	0.7
11	Une personne déchire	2	0.8	0.7
12	Une personne coupe	2	1.4	1.3
13	La fille lit/regarde le livre	2	1.2	1.0
14	La fille colorie	2	1.0	0.8
15	Nombres: cinq, quatorze, vingt, huit, sept	5	3.6	4.0
16	Formes: cercle, triangle, carré	3	2.8	2.5
17	Il pleure. L'avion est brisé	4	1.9	1.4
18	La fille est contente	2	1.5	1.3
	Mean total score		25.7	22.9
	Standard deviation		6.4	8.0
	Number of cases		31	31

Use of the past and future tenses

Two questions were asked of the children about their activities in the classroom, one at the beginning and one at the end of the interview. The interviewer asked what the child had been doing prior to coming to the classroom, "Qu'est-ce que tu faisais dans ta classe?" as the first question. At the end of the interview the students were asked the second question regarding what they would be doing when they returned to class, "Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire quand tu retourneras dans ta classe?".

Each response was rated on a score of 0 to 4 depending on the length and accuracy of the response. A single verb or noun response such as "jouer" or "cercle" was given a score of 2 regardless of form. A score of 3 was given if the student responded with both a noun or pronoun and a verb. These responses varied in length, were sometimes in English and French, and frequently included use of an incorrect tense of the verb. Some examples of responses which were given a score of 3 are as follows:

Je travaille.
Je fais des avions de papier.
On a fait... going to the bibliothèque.

If the student was able to respond with any noun or pronoun and a verb in a correct form and number a score of 4 was given. A range of responses was noted in this category such as:

Je jouais.
J'ai travaillé.
Avant ça, j'ai fait un cercle avec les autres amis.
Jouer avec mes amis.

As shown on Table 6 the students in Group A obtained a significantly higher mean score for their responses to both questions than did the students in Group B ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 6

A GROUP COMPARISON OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES IN THE USE OF THE PAST AND FUTURE TENSES

Score	Nature of the Response	Number of students Group A	Group B
	Use of the past tense		
0	did not understand question/no response	10	18
1	used only English or said "je ne sais pas"	3	3
2	responded with a noun or a verb	3	1
3	responded with a noun or a pronoun and a verb	9	6
4	used a noun or pronoun with correct verb tense	6	3
	Use of the future tense		
0	did not understand question/no response	5	14
1	used only English or said "je ne sais pas"	4	5
2	responded with a noun or a verb	8	4
3	responded with a noun or a pronoun and a verb	7	3
4	used a noun or pronoun with correct verb tense	7	5
	Mean	4.2*	2.5
	Standard deviation	2.6	2.7
	N	31	31

* The mean for Group A is significantly higher than that for Group B ($p < 0.05$).

Summary of test scores

A summary of the scores on the six tests described previously is given in Table 7, with the two listening comprehension tests followed by the four tests of expressive language, rather than in the order in which they were administered. For three of the tests the mean for

five-year-olds with two years of experience in French immersion (Group A) is significantly greater than the mean for those who had completed one year in a French immersion kindergarten. For each of the remaining three tests the group with two years' experience had the higher score, although the differences between the groups were not significant.

TABLE 7

SUMMARY OF TEST DATA

Test	Possible score	Group A Mean	Group A SD	Group B Mean	Group B SD
Listening comprehension					
Picture recognition	28	24.8**	1.5	23.6	2.0
Le casse-tête (coccinelles)	13	11.6	1.1	11.3	1.9
Expressive language					
Le lapin dans le panier	14	10.4	2.0	9.9	2.6
Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans la bofte?	10	6.7*	2.5	5.0	3.1
Les cartes	41	25.7	6.4	22.9	8.0
Use of tenses: past and future	8	4.4*	3.0	2.8	3.2

** The mean for Group A is significantly higher than that for Group B ($p < 0.01$).
* The mean for Group A is significantly higher than that for Group B ($p < 0.05$).

These essentially experimental tests seemed to be effective in measuring the French listening comprehension and expressive skills of children in five-year-old immersion kindergarten, although the two listening comprehension tests tended to be rather easy and to have limited variability. It is hoped that the experience with these tests will make it possible to prepare revisions which can be used at the same grade level and perhaps extended to measure similar skills at the first and second grade level.

ADDITIONAL EVALUATION

General impression

Before the child returned to the classroom, he or she was shown a a picture in which kindergarten children are performing a number of typical classroom activities. The interviewer, opening the book at the selected picture said, "J'ai apporté un livre. Nous allons le regarder ensemble. Il y a des enfants qui font les mêmes choses que toi, à l'école. Regarde-le, un peu".

After the child had studied the picture for a moment the interviewer then asked the child, "Dis-moi ce que les enfants font. Raconte-moi l'histoire des enfants". Nothing more was said by the interviewer. Most children appeared to enjoy this activity, discussing the picture at length and some were surprised when the interviewer did not go on to show the other pages in the book. For those children who found it difficult to begin to comment on the picture a simple question was asked or a comment offered. The responses ranged in length from a single verb or noun to a number of lengthy sentences. This section of the evaluation was not scored separately, but was used by the examiner in making an overall assessment.

Immediately after the interview and while the child was being escorted back to the kindergarten classroom, the interviewer completed a short evaluation sheet recording her general impressions of the student's language performance.

The following observations are based on a tabulation of the interviewers' recorded impressions. It was evident from the verbal and physical responses of the children from both groups that they understood most of what was said to them during the interview. In addition,

approximately 75 per cent of both groups responded entirely in French. Of the students with two years in French Immersion 84 per cent responded with a noun or a pronoun and a verb often or most of the time as compared to 52 per cent of the other group.

The interviewers' records regarding the length of the childrens' responses were also examined. For the central fifty per cent of the group it was found that those students with more experience in French used sentences ranging from six to ten words in length as compared to a length of three to nine words for the matched group.

Students' test behaviour

Many of the students from both groups spoke clearly with a natural intonation, pace and volume. Most of them appeared interested and confident, some showing an obvious increase in confidence with each success and as they gained familiarity. When they were unable to respond, about one out of three children reacted by silently waiting with no obvious concern until the next item was produced and another third indicated verbally in English or with a gesture that the item was unknown or had been forgotten. Seven other students indicated their inability with "J'ai oublié","Qu'est-ce que c'est?", or "Je ne sais pas". Most of the children carefully considered their answers, but it was noted that a few who immediately indicated they could not answer often responded if a pause was taken giving them time to reconsider. Of the remaining (four or five) students there were some whose answers were unclear and very softly spoken or who spoke slowly or with hesitation. Some were unsure and looked to the interviewer for reassurance with each answer, some contorted their faces in an effort to remember. There were a few students who wiggled and twisted and frowned or seemed

impatient with themselves in their search for vocabulary and others who smiled and laughed at the humour in the pictures. One child was so interested that he left his chair and climbed onto the table to be closer to the objects used in the test.

Although it was clear that the children could understand many more words than they could use in their own speech, they were very effective in finding other ways to communicate their ideas. For example, several took the sock and held it near their foot, saying "Mette-la" or "you could put it on your pied." Some held the button to their shirt and said, "Pour attacher la bouton," showing no concern at their lack of vocabulary but rather a keen interest in communicating their ideas.

A response in English was accepted with no comment. If a child did not produce any response at all, the interviewer would make an encouraging comment and continue. A few used "un bonhomme" or "mon ami" to indicate a person in every case where a subject was needed. One child kept her mouth tightly closed and said very little in either language, while others used complete sentences for everything, even the section of the interview where it had been indicated that only a non-verbal response was required. Others added comments throughout the interview or during the walk between the classroom and the interview room:

- I'm going to tell my dad. He doesn't know the word for ladybug. He teaches me new words once in a while.
- L'enfant qui se cache - at least she's trying to.
- My parents talk French and think I don't understand, but I do.
- Trois et deux est fait cinq.
- Deux, deux, quatre, avec un equals cinq
- Il y a cinq. Je n'ai pas compté.

Two additional children were included in the interviews although they were not part of either the sample or the matched group. One entered the class from an English programme at the beginning of April with French to become his third language. Despite the late entry into French immersion this student's scores were close to the mean of the sample group for all sections of the interview except the use of past and future tenses. The other child, who had been in four-year-old immersion kindergarten, was reported as showing no interest at all in learning French. During the interview this student tried at every opportunity to lead the interviewer into a discussion of topics entirely unrelated to those of the interview. The mean scores for this student were lower than those for either the sample or matched group.

At the end of the interview each child was thanked for coming to help and was told, "Tu parles bien français et j'ai aimé parler avec toi. Au revoir". Most children smiled, said "au revoir" and left, but several added comments, none quite as elaborate as that of a boy who said. "Au revoir. Merci d'avoir joué des jeux en français avec moi".

Educators' comments

Some comments from both teachers and principals with respect to experiences in the immersion kindergartens were noted during the visits made to the two schools. Some made general comments about the likelihood of a child's success in the programme:

- Auditory perception and attitude make the difference (in learning French as a second language).
- Second-language children, Italian, Spanish etc. learn French faster in the French-immersion class.
- Their behaviour and attention span is going to be the same whether it is in English or French.

- Insecure children didn't improve whether they had one or two years in French immersion (kindergarten).

- For the very bright child the content of the French-immersion programme offers only the minimum.

Others made comments which referred to methods used or the organization of the class:

- We started out keeping the four-year-old immersion students in their own class but constraints of number meant they had to be combined.

- I am not going to speak French to a child in trauma. At that point they need their own language.

- There can be a big difference between classes. One is a quiet group, the other is large with some children who lack confidence. Children with special needs have a hard time to listen to each other in English let alone French; consequently their listening skills are not well developed.

- Children who have difficulty communicating in English are not helped in French; English is needed more often for these children, consequently they hear less French. The problem of learning French is exacerbated.

- Attention and discipline are difficult in the second language. Use of facial expression and body language helps.

- I use some English (in the beginning weeks of senior kindergarten) and this is necessary for some children but it is also less traumatic for the students who were in four-year-old French immersion too, as it is a gradual introduction as it was in the fall of their first year.

- Children must use complete sentences at circle time.

- My group is very large and it takes a special technique and lots of work to have them stay attentive very long as a group so I speak individually with the children in French as they do their work.

Some made comments about the differences between the groups being studied, or about individual children:

- Children who have two years of immersion appear the same at the end of the year but in the beginning they are very helpful because they already know some French. Their

attention span is longer and their behavior is better because they are part of the situation.

- One boy who said nothing in French for months suddenly started speaking it.

Parents' responses

As mentioned earlier, a questionnaire was designed and sent to parents of children in both programmes in May 1984. Of the total number of questionnaires received, 19 were from parents of children in the sample group of 31 who enrolled in French immersion classes at the four-year-old level and seven from parents of the matched group at the five-year-old level. A tabulation of these 26 responses indicates that 40 per cent of the families with more than one child had enrolled another child in the French immersion programme as well. Only six parents indicated that the child had had any difficulty in adjusting to the senior kindergarten, all but one related to making friends at school or maintaining friendships at home. The characteristics of students listed by most parents indicated that their child was moderately to highly active, talkative, outgoing, independent and able to concentrate well. A few parents however, indicated that their child tended to be shy or easily distracted.

Parents indicated that their main expectation in choosing to enrol their child in the programme was that they would learn French. Some added such comments as: that it was a gentle introduction, was better at a young age or gave an opportunity to test the programme for their particular child. Most parents also indicated that the programme had been successful in achieving their goals, that it had been a suitable choice for their child and that they would enrol their child again, given the opportunity.

Of the nine suggested changes for the senior immersion kindergarten, four from the same school requested fewer pupils in the class. Three parents suggested a more challenging programme oriented toward subjects such as reading and mathematics and one wrote, "Perhaps more aspects of the French culture could be introduced such as French Canadian food, music, dance or a winter carnival". All the respondents except one who was undecided indicated that their child would be enrolled in a French immersion grade one class in September, 1984.

With a few exceptions those involved with the four-year-old immersion kindergarten seem satisfied with the programme. There was some evidence that children in this programme could communicate somewhat better than a matched group with only one year of immersion. The question of lasting effect cannot be answered without continuing to follow the students.